



OGIS Issue Assessment: Agency Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Websites (Follow-up to 2021 assessment)

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What OGIS Found	What OGIS Recommends
Finding 1: The vast majority (17 of 21) of the FOIA websites OGIS reviewed lacked at least one benchmark needed to navigate the FOIA process.	Recommendation 1: Agencies should address deficiencies in their FOIA websites to include all basic information needed to navigate the FOIA process.
Finding 2: Of 170 comparable data points between 2021 and 2026, 15 data points showed improvement.	
Finding 3: About one fifth of the 21 agency FOIA websites OGIS visited do not clearly explain how requesters can obtain an estimated date of completion.	Recommendation 2: Agencies should provide clear information and instructions on how to obtain an estimated date of completion on their FOIA websites.
Finding 4: Publication of FOIA logs is inconsistent. One third of agencies that OGIS examined do not publish complete FOIA logs.	Recommendation 3: Agencies should—at a minimum—post FOIA logs on their FOIA websites and consider including the 13 categories identified in FOIA Advisory Committee Recommendation 2026-02.
What OGIS Reviewed	
From March 2 to March 13, 2026, OGIS reviewed the 21 FOIA websites of all 15 Cabinet-level departments and the six independent agencies that appeared in the 2021 assessment (published in 2022). OGIS reviewed the websites for 10 benchmarks, which were selected from the 25 benchmarks that were used in OGIS's prior assessment based on their usefulness to requesters and to the FOIA process as a whole.	

Executive Summary

Agency Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) websites are often a requester's first stop when looking for information about filing a FOIA request. In March 2026, the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) reviewed the FOIA websites of 21 Cabinet-level and independent agencies to determine whether they provide the basic information requesters need to navigate the FOIA process. OGIS reviewed each website for 10 types of information, or benchmarks, drawn from its 2021 assessment. This assessment builds upon the prior recommendations with four new findings and three new recommendations.

The 10 benchmarks OGIS reviewed in the 2026 data collection were selected because of their usefulness to requesters and to the FOIA process as a whole. These 10 were selected from the 25 benchmarks that were used in OGIS's [2021 FOIA Website Assessment](#), which OGIS developed from the FOIA statute, OIP guidance, and FOIA Advisory Committee best practices. In choosing these 10 benchmarks, OGIS sought to represent the essential information a FOIA website should contain. Including all basic information needed to navigate FOIA improves the process for all—requesters and agencies.

OGIS found that agency FOIA websites generally provide much of the basic information requesters need, but important gaps remain. Seventeen of the 21 websites were missing at least one of the 10 benchmarks OGIS reviewed. The most significant gaps involved information about obtaining an estimated date of completion (EDC), appeal deadlines, and publication of FOIA logs. OGIS also found little overall improvement among the website information it could compare between 2021 and 2026.

This assessment follows OGIS's 2021 review of agency FOIA websites. OGIS published its [first assessment of FOIA websites](#) in November 2022. That review responded to a recommendation from the 2018–2020 term of the FOIA Advisory Committee (*Recommendation 2020-01*) that OGIS assess the clarity and availability of information on agency FOIA websites and use the results to inform further guidance from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Information Policy (OIP). This year, OGIS re-reviewed agency FOIA websites as part of its statutory mandate to review FOIA policies, procedures, and compliance.

The 10 benchmarks were designed to discover whether websites provide requesters the information they need to navigate the FOIA process, including how to make a FOIA request via a portal or online form, whom to contact for assistance (including contact information for the agency's FOIA Public Liaison), how to obtain an estimated date of completion (EDC), and how to

appeal an agency's initial response. While some of the benchmarks are statutorily required, others represent good customer service. Lack of inclusion in this assessment does not imply that the benchmark is not important. The selected benchmarks are the ones OGIS observes are the most helpful to requesters who seek OGIS assistance.

While there was some improvement in FOIA websites since 2021, 81% of the websites OGIS visited in 2026 lacked at least one detail needed to navigate the FOIA process. OGIS also found deficiencies in information about obtaining EDCs and inconsistent FOIA log publication. OGIS makes three recommendations: agencies should ensure their FOIA websites include *all* basic information needed to navigate the FOIA process; explain clearly how requesters can obtain an EDC not just a status update; and post FOIA logs on their websites.

Many of the deficiencies OGIS identified could be remedied by implementing recommendations made by the 2020-2022 and 2024-2026 terms of the FOIA Advisory Committee. Specifically, in *Recommendation [2022-07](#)*, the Committee listed 16 elements that agencies should include on their FOIA websites, including links to descriptions of the records maintained by the agency and those that do not exist at the agency; agency records schedules; a FOIA request submission form; and contact information for agency FOIA personnel. And in *Recommendation [2026-02](#)*, the Committee built upon its prior work by recommending that Congress mandate publication of agency FOIA logs to contain, at a minimum, 13 fields generally maintained by agency FOIA tracking systems.

Finally, guidance from OIP, [Agency FOIA Websites 2.0](#), could also assist agencies in improving their FOIA websites.

Background

On July 9, 2020, the FOIA Advisory Committee submitted 22 recommendations for government-wide improvements to FOIA to the Archivist of the United States. *Recommendation [2020-01](#)* was among several intended to enhance online access to information about the FOIA process.

We recommend that [OGIS] undertake an assessment of the information agencies make publicly available on their FOIA websites to facilitate the FOIA filing process and for the purpose of informing further guidance by [OIP] on how agencies may improve online descriptions of the process.

This recommendation is consistent with OGIS's and OIP's respective roles. OGIS, as the federal FOIA Ombuds, reviews FOIA policies, procedures, and compliance, and identifies procedures and methods for improving FOIA compliance. OIP, as part of its responsibilities to encourage agency compliance with FOIA, provides FOIA guidance to federal agencies. In that role, OIP issued [10 basic recommendations](#) for agency websites, updated in December 2024.

OGIS has observed that effective FOIA websites benefit both requesters and agencies. They may lead to improved requests by answering questions before agency staff need to address them.

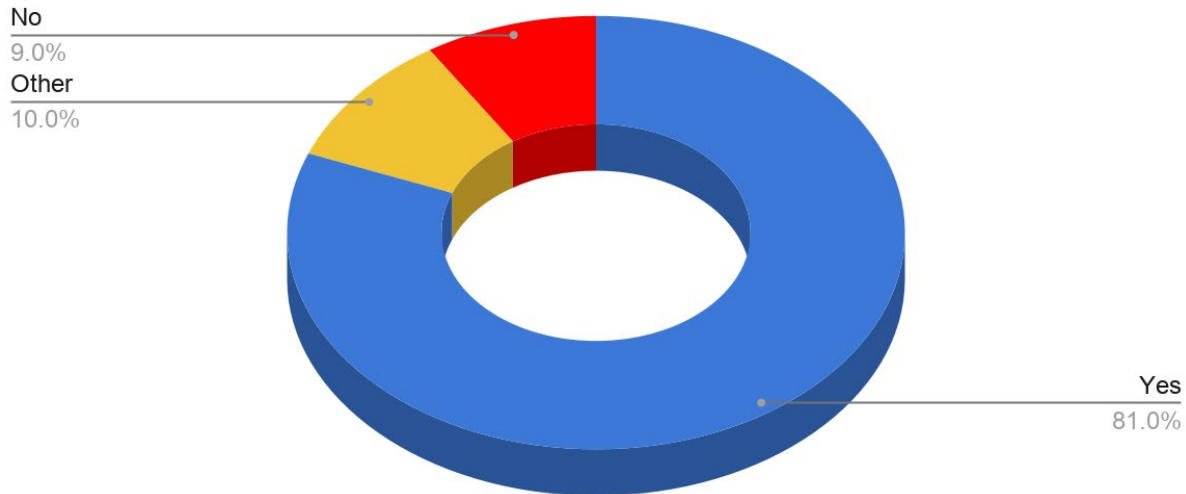
2026 Data

The 2026 data collection looked at 10 benchmarks across a sample of 21 government websites (See the Methodology section of this report for a discussion of sample selection):

1. Does the agency have a FOIA Library/Reading Room where documents are available?
2. Does the FOIA website instruct the public on how to make a request or link to such instructions (such as in a FOIA Reference Guide or Handbook)?
3. Does the FOIA website directly link to a FOIA request submission form (if requests can be made via a portal or online form)?
4. Does the FOIA website link to the agency's FOIA regulations?
5. Does the FOIA website provide contact information for the FOIA Office(s)?
6. Does the FOIA website provide contact information for the "FOIA Public Liaison"?
7. Does the FOIA website provide/link to instructions for obtaining the status of a request and how to request an estimated date of completion?
8. Does the FOIA website describe or link to a description of the administrative appeals process?
9. Does the FOIA website inform requesters that they have 90 days to file an appeal?
10. Does the agency/component post agency FOIA logs to its FOIA website and/or FOIA Library/Reading Room?

Overall, agency websites included most of the information OGIS was assessing. Of the 210 data points collected, 81% met the applicable benchmark, and 9% of them did not. Additionally, OGIS could not determine whether the remaining 10% met the benchmark, often because the agency provided the information through an agency portal that OGIS could not access. These items were scored as "Other, see note."

2026 Data Collection (210 Data Points)



The 2026 survey found there were six benchmarks included in 81% of surveyed websites. There was one benchmark included in 100% of the websites surveyed.

Agency FOIA websites generally did well in providing basic information about how to make a request. All 21 websites OGIS reviewed provided instructions on how to make a request or provided a link to those instructions. (The FOIA statute requires agencies to publish “a handbook for obtaining various types and categories of public information,” 5 U.S.C. § 552(g).

Most websites also provided several other types of basic FOIA information. Of the 21 websites reviewed:

- 20 linked to the agency’s FOIA regulations (95.2%);
- 20 provided contact information for the agency’s FOIA office (95.2%);
- 19 linked directly to an online FOIA request form (90.5%);
- 18 provided a FOIA Library or Reading Room (85.7%);
- 17 provided information about the administrative appeals process (81%); and
- 17 provided contact information for the agency’s FOIA Public Liaison (81%).

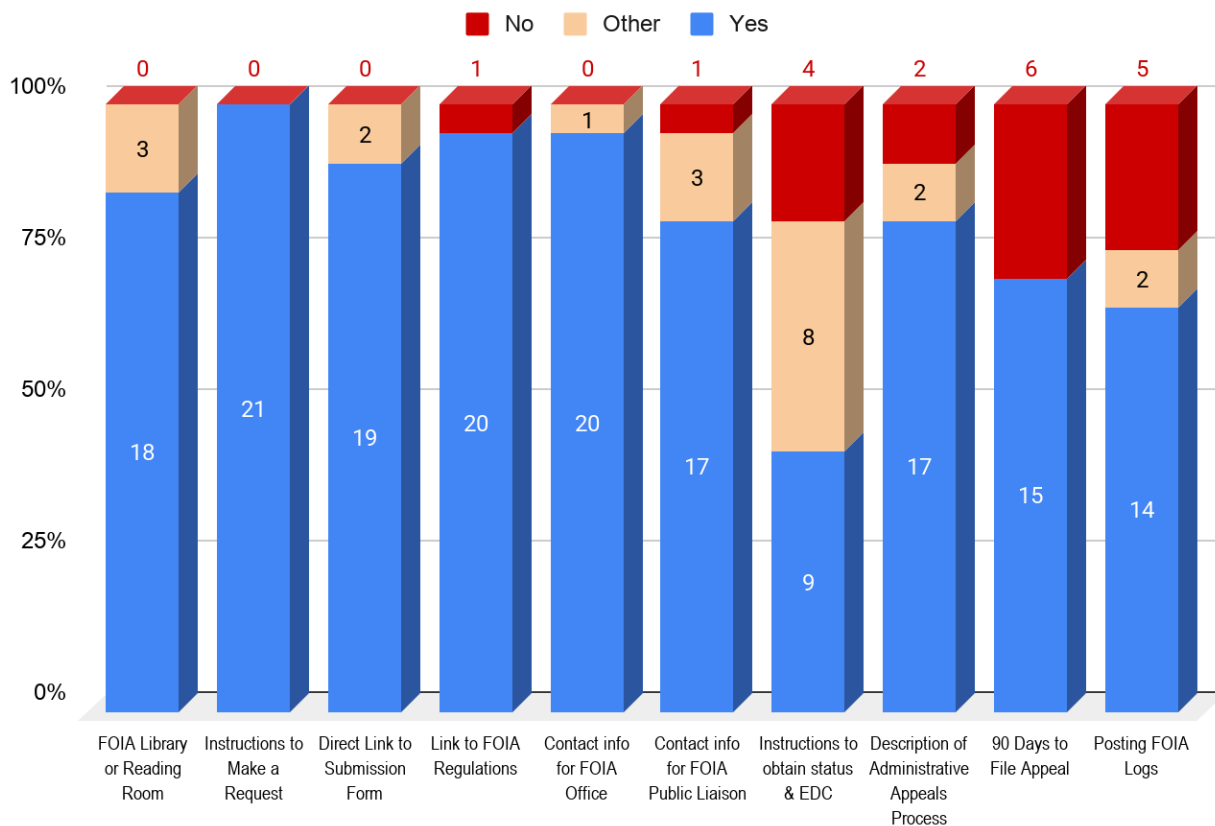
OGIS found larger gaps in other areas. Fifteen of the 21 websites informed requesters that they have 90 days to file an administrative appeal (71.4%), and 14 posted FOIA logs (66.7%).

Information about obtaining an estimated date of completion (EDC) was the least consistently available of the 10 benchmarks OGIS reviewed. Nine of the 21 websites (42.9%) clearly explained how to obtain both the status of a request and an EDC (See Finding 3). This reflects the fact that eight websites use requester portals that were not fully accessible to OGIS reviewers. It may be that these portals comply with the EDC requirement; however, OGIS was unable to independently verify whether or not they do. Four websites clearly did not meet this benchmark (19%).

This gap reflects a problem OGIS regularly hears about from requesters. In FY 2025, OGIS contacted agencies 156 times on behalf of requesters who had come to OGIS because they had been unable to obtain EDCs despite multiple attempts. That number grew to 182 as of July 31, 2026, with two months left in FY 2026.

Breakdown by Benchmark

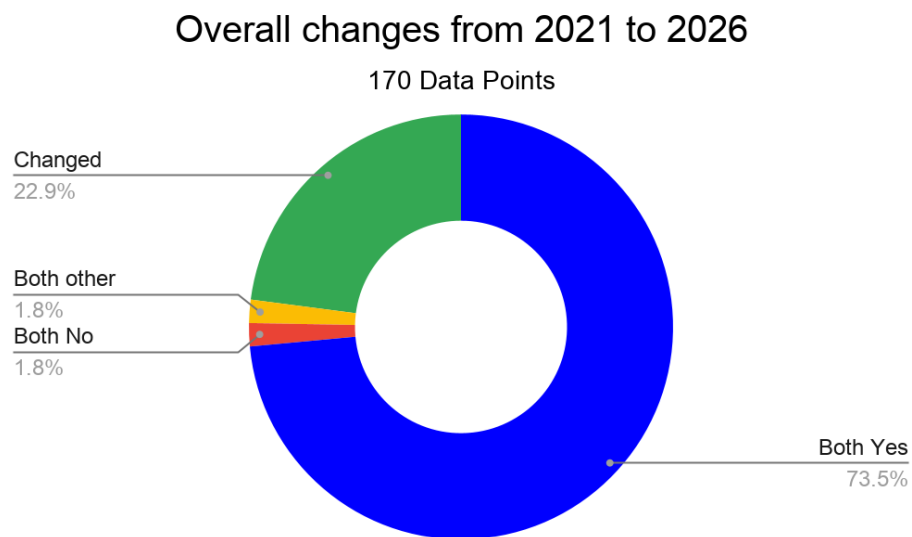
2026 Website Assessment



Three benchmarks appeared on fewer than 80% of the websites surveyed, including one that appeared on only 42.9% of websites.

Comparison from 2021 to 2026

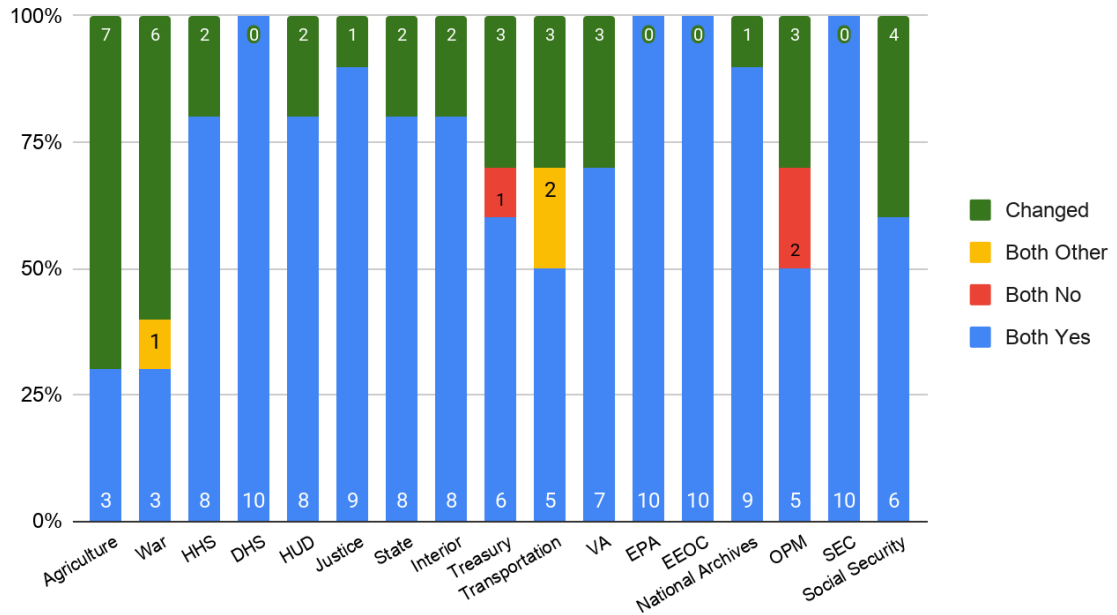
The benchmarks were met in both the 2021 and 2026 assessment for 125 of the 170 comparable data points (73.5%). This reflects a high degree of consistency across the two assessments with nearly three quarters of the data points met on both. Only three data points (1.8%) were “Both No,” and another three (1.8%) were “Both Other.” The remaining 39 datapoints (22.9%) changed between the two assessments.



Four agencies—the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)—met all 10 comparable benchmarks in both the 2021 and 2026 assessments. Six agencies—the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Justice, State and Interior, along with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)—met eight or nine of the comparable benchmarks in both 2021 and 2026.

Change Over Time by Agency

2021 to 2026



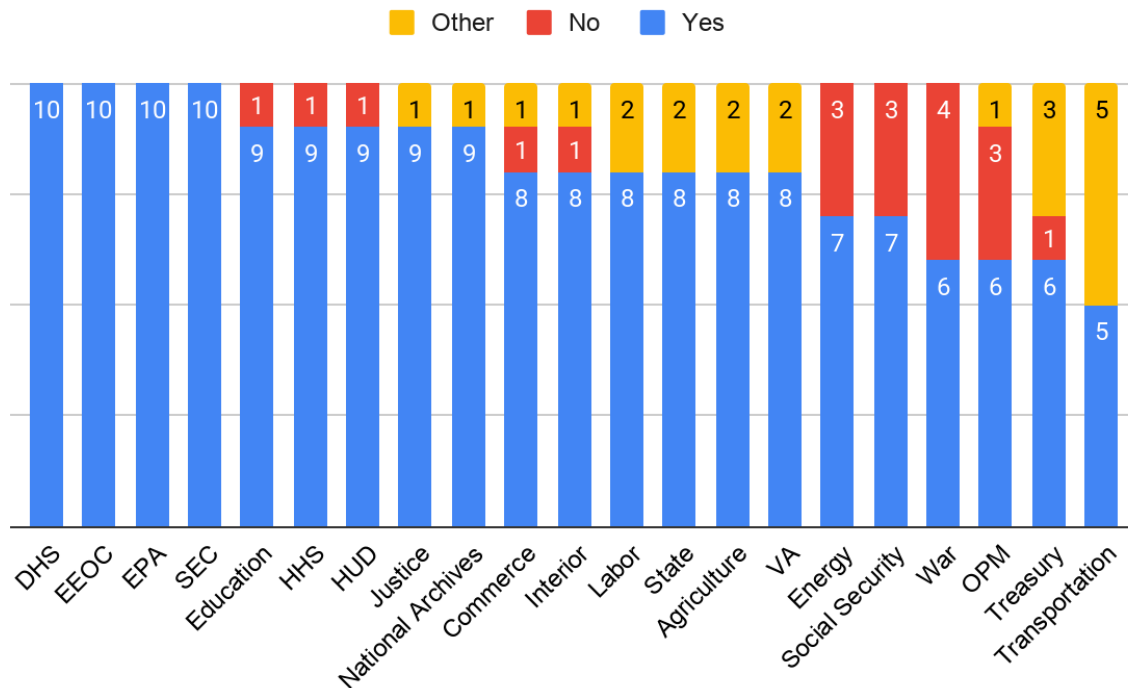
Note: four cabinet-level departments' FOIA websites were not reviewed in 2021— Commerce, Education, Energy, and Labor.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1: The vast majority (17 of 21) of the FOIA websites OGIS reviewed lacked at least one benchmark needed to navigate the FOIA process.

Seventeen agencies (81%) lacked at least one of the 10 benchmarks in 2026; only four agencies met all 10 benchmarks (19%). Five agencies (23.8%) fell short on only one benchmark and scored "Yes" on the other nine benchmarks.

Agency Scores 2026



It is notable that all 21 agencies OGIS reviewed included "instructions for filing a [FOIA] request" (See "Breakdown by Benchmark" chart on page 6). By contrast, among the benchmarks appearing least frequently, seven agency websites (33.3%), did not post full FOIA logs, and six (28.6%) did not include a clear statement that requesters have 90 days to file an appeal.

Finding 2: Of 170 comparable data points between 2021 and 2026, 15 data points showed improvement.

OGIS's review showed minimal improvement between 2021 and 2026. Of the 170 comparable data points, 15 (8.8%) improved, while 24 (14.1%) reflected a decline in compliance. Among the 15 data points that showed improvement from 2021 to 2026, "No" to "Yes" occurred nine times (5.3%) across the 170 datapoints, largely reflecting improvements in portal links and FOIA logs. "Other" to "Yes" occurred four times (2.4%) and "No" to "Other" had two occurrences (1.2%).

Additionally, OGIS noted 24 instances (14.1%) of benchmarks that were in compliance in 2021 but no longer in 2026. "Yes" to "Other" was the most frequent change with 13 (7.7%) occurrences, driven by the difficulty OGIS had in the 2026 data collection of verifying whether portals were generating EDCs when requesters asked for them.

Of greater concern were instances in which OGIS confirmed that agency websites no longer met a benchmark. Seven data points (4.1%) changed from “Yes” to “No” across several benchmarks, including whether agency websites described the administrative appeal process or posted FOIA logs. Four data points (2.4%) changed from “Other” to “No” —two each under the criteria “Does the FOIA website provide/link to instructions for obtaining the status of a request and how to request an estimated date of completion?” and “Does the FOIA website inform requesters that they have 90 days to file an appeal?”

Recommendation 1: Agencies should address deficiencies in their FOIA websites to include all basic information needed to navigate the FOIA process.

Finding 3: About one fifth of the 21 agency FOIA websites OGIS visited do not clearly explain how requesters can obtain an estimated date of completion (EDC).

FOIA requesters have a statutory right to an estimated date of completion (EDC) upon request. Congress amended FOIA in 2007 to require agencies to establish a telephone line or online service that provides requesters with status information, including the date on which the agency originally received the request and “an estimated date on which the agency will complete action on the request.” (5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(7)(B)(ii)). (See [*Office of Government Information Services Advisory Opinion No. 2020-01: Agencies Must Provide Estimated Dates of Completion Upon Request*](#)).

In assessing 21 agency FOIA websites, OGIS found that approximately one fifth (19%) failed to clearly inform requesters how to obtain an EDC. The websites that failed to meet this benchmark contained no information about obtaining an EDC and also lacked information about tracking a request or obtaining a status update.

Additionally, OGIS could not verify compliance with this benchmark for over one third (38.1%) of the reviewed websites largely due to the use of agency FOIA portals inaccessible to OGIS. Some agencies provided requesters with information about how to obtain the *status* of a request or how to track their request but did not provide information or a means for obtaining an EDC. It is possible that these portals may provide a means for requesting an EDC in compliance with the statute; however, OGIS was unable to verify whether they do.

There is an important distinction between the status of a request and an EDC. For example, a status could be one of many things including but not limited to: “assigned for processing,” “conducting search” or “under agency review.” While the ability to request and obtain a status is a useful tool for requesters, it does not fulfill the statutory requirement to provide an EDC upon request.

An EDC is the agency's best approximation of when it anticipates responding to a request. Guidance issued by OIP states that agencies "should make a reasonable judgment as to when they believe processing will be complete, based upon what remains to be done in a given case and in light of the agency's experience with processing similar requests. (See [OGIS Issue Assessment: Agency Compliance with the Estimated Date of Completion Requirement of the Freedom of Information Act](#)).

Because EDCs are statutorily mandated, agency FOIA websites should clearly explain how requesters can obtain an EDC, not just a status update. FOIA requires agencies to establish a service that provides requesters with an EDC upon request. Providing a queue number, such as "your request is 125th in the queue," does not satisfy this statutory requirement; agencies must provide an actual estimated date of completion when it is requested.

Clear instructions for obtaining an EDC are helpful in various ways, including helping to set expectations for requesters and can encourage them to narrow the scope of their requests if the estimate is lengthy. Therefore, it is critical that agency websites differentiate between requesting a status update and the request for a formal EDC. OGIS has repeatedly emphasized the importance of this requirement. In 2020, OGIS published an [Ombuds Observer](#) highlighting the importance of EDCs; and in 2024, OGIS published a second [Ombuds Observer](#) reiterating the need for agencies to provide EDCs upon request.

Recommendation 2: Agencies should provide clear information and instructions on how to obtain an estimated date of completion on their FOIA websites.

Finding 4: Publication of FOIA logs is inconsistent. One third of agencies that OGIS examined do not publish complete FOIA logs.

In reviewing 21 agency FOIA websites, OGIS found the publication of FOIA logs remains inconsistent. Seven agencies (33.3%) either did not publish complete FOIA logs or published only FOIA logs for some component offices. In its [2021 FOIA Website Assessment](#), OGIS noted that "agencies should commit to reviewing their websites regularly for outdated information" and specifically noted the need to include "the latest FOIA logs in electronic reading rooms."

FOIA logs have consistently been a priority for the FOIA Advisory Committee. Across several terms, the Committee has approved several recommendations and best practices aimed at encouraging regular publication of FOIA logs in standardized, accessible formats. Access to FOIA logs can help requesters identify records that have already been requested and disclosed,

submit more precise requests, and potentially narrow the scope of new requests. Regular publication of FOIA logs can also benefit agencies by reducing duplicative requests and facilitating more efficient processing.

The 2020-2022 term of the FOIA Advisory Committee made two recommendations concerning publication of FOIA logs. First, it recommended that OIP encourage agencies to post certain information beyond what is required by law, which would include FOIA logs (*Recommendation [2022-07](#)*). The same FOIA Advisory Committee term recommended that agencies endeavor to provide regular and proactive online publication of searchable FOIA logs containing certain information in Excel/CSV (comma-separated values) format. (*Recommendation [2022-10](#)*)

More recently, the 2024-2026 FOIA Advisory Committee has recommended that Congress amend FOIA's affirmative disclosure provisions to require agencies to publish FOIA logs on at least a quarterly basis, with agencies receiving fewer than 100 requests per year to publish semiannually. The recommendation calls for logs to be published in machine-readable format and transmitted to DOJ for additional posting on [foia.gov](https://www.foia.gov). (*Recommendation [2026-02](#)*)

The 2024-2026 Committee further recommended that the published FOIA logs contain, at a minimum, 13 fields generally maintained in agency FOIA tracking systems:

- 1) the tracking number of the request,
- 2) the date of the request,
- 3) the name of the requester, unless the requester is a first-person requester seeking access to their own information,
- 4) the organizational affiliation of the requester, if identified in the request,
- 5) the subject matter of the request,
- 6) the status of the request,
- 7) the result of the request (if closed),
- 8) exemptions cited, if any,
- 9) the date on which the request was resolved,
- 10) the fee category assigned to the request,
- 11) whether a fee waiver was requested,
- 12) if a fee waiver was requested, whether it was granted, and
- 13) fees charged to the requester, if any.

Although FOIA does not currently require agencies to proactively publish their FOIA logs, publication of these logs can provide significant benefits to both requesters and agencies. Agencies already maintain much of this information as part of their FOIA tracking and statutory reporting responsibilities.

Although not a statutory requirement, OIP's [existing guidance on proactive disclosures](#) encourages agencies to go beyond FOIA's requirements when posting records to their websites. The [Attorney General's March 15, 2022 FOIA Guidelines](#) also emphasize that agencies should maximize their efforts to make records available without requiring individuals to file FOIA requests, emphasizing the importance of proactive disclosures. Consistent with that guidance, the FOIA Advisory Committee's repeated recommendations, and the benefits to both requesters and agencies, OGIS encourages agencies to regularly publish complete, current, and searchable FOIA logs in machine-readable formats.

Recommendation 3: Agencies should—at a minimum—post FOIA logs on their FOIA websites and consider including the 13 categories identified in FOIA Advisory Committee Recommendation 2026-02.

Methodology

The 2018-2020 term of the FOIA Advisory Committee recommended that OGIS assess agency FOIA websites for clarity and availability of information about filing a FOIA request (*Recommendation* [2020-01](#)). OGIS's foundational work in complying with this recommendation was its report Assessing FOIA Compliance through the [2019 NARA Records Management Self-Assessment](#), published in March 2021. The assessment leveraged NARA's annual Records Management Self-Assessment (RMSA) to ask what types of information agencies include on their FOIA websites about requesting records. OGIS built on the data from the RMSA by reviewing information on FOIA websites from January to April 2021 and published an issue assessment in November 2022. OGIS had three findings and two recommendations.

For the original assessment, OGIS established 25 benchmarks based on several sources, including the FOIA statute, OIP guidance, and FOIA Advisory Committee best practices. OGIS reviewed the websites for 12 Cabinet-level departments, their component agencies, and six independent agencies that together received 97 percent of FOIA requests governmentwide in FY 2021.

The Cabinet-level FOIA websites of the Departments of Commerce, Education, and Energy were not reviewed in 2021. Additionally, the findings for the top-level website for the Department of Labor were inadvertently not included in the final 2021 assessment. This left the direct comparison from 2021 to 2026 with 17 agencies and 10 benchmarks, with the comparable dataset from 2021 to 2026 consisting of 170 data points.

For the 2026 assessment, OGIS used 10 measurement criteria as benchmarks. These were identified by looking at the 25 previous benchmarks OGIS had used in the 2021 data collection and evaluating each one in terms of usefulness to requesters in navigating the FOIA process. From this evaluation, OGIS identified the 10 benchmarks for this survey. (See Appendix B)

To select the sample of websites to be assessed in 2026, OGIS chose the 21 major federal agencies as designated by the Chief Financial Officers Act—15 Cabinet-level departments and five independent agencies—plus the National Archives and Records Administration. Mirroring the 2021 assessment, the agencies chosen for the 2026 review together accounted for 97% of FOIA requests received in FY 2025. OGIS used each of the 15 Cabinet-level department websites as a representative of FOIA website compliance among their component agencies.

OGIS reviewed the websites from March 2 to March 13, 2026, noting the presence or absence of each benchmark.

Note: It is important to acknowledge that OGIS assessments of agency FOIA websites reflect a snapshot in time, and FOIA programs may have updated their websites since the reviews were conducted.

Appendix A - Agencies Reviewed and Acronyms (and links to FOIA webpage)

[Department of Agriculture](#) - USDA
[Department of Commerce](#) - DOC
[Department of War](#) - DOW
[Department of Education](#) - DOE
[Department of Energy](#) - DOE
[Department of Health and Human Services](#) - HHS
[Department of Homeland Security](#) - DHS
[Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) - HUD
[Department of Justice](#) - DOJ
[Department of Labor](#) - DOL
[Department of State](#) - DOS
[Department of the Interior](#) - DOI
[Department of the Treasury](#) - Treasury
[Department of Transportation](#) - DOT
[Department of Veterans Affairs](#) - VA
[Environmental Protection Agency](#) - EPA
[Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) - EEOC
[National Archives and Records Administration](#) - NARA
[Office of Personnel Management](#) - OPM
[Securities and Exchange Commission](#) - SEC
[Social Security Administration](#) - SSA

Appendix B - 2021 Assessment Questions

Questions in bold were included in the 2026 assessment.

1. **Does the agency have a FOIA Library/Reading Room where documents are available?**
2. Date agency/comp. last updated, published, or modified FOIA Library/Reading Room (if the information is available)
3. Does the FOIA website describe or link to a description of records maintained by the agency?
4. **Does the FOIA website instruct the public on how to make a request or link to such instructions (such as in a FOIA Reference Guide or Handbook)?**
5. **Does the FOIA website directly link to a FOIA request submission form (if requests can be made via a portal or online form)?**
6. Does the FOIA website provide/link to requirements for seeking expedited processing?
7. Does the FOIA website provide/link to information about FOIA fee categories?
8. Does the FOIA website provide/link to requirements for seeking a FOIA fee waiver?
9. Does the FOIA webpage explain/link to an explanation of FOIA's nine exemptions?
10. Does the FOIA website explain/link to an explanation that requesters will be less likely to receive information about someone else without their written consent?
11. **Does the FOIA website link to the agency's FOIA regulations?**
12. **Does the FOIA website provide contact information for the FOIA Office(s)?**
13. **Does the FOIA website provide contact information for the "FOIA Public Liaison"?**
14. Does the FOIA website explain the role of the agency/comp FOIA Public Liaison?
15. Does the FOIA website explain/link to an explanation of what constitutes an "agency record?"
16. If the agency uses multi-track processing, does the FOIA website clearly define "simple" and "complex" requests?
17. Does the FOIA website provide, in a prominent place, the average processing times for requests, including for "simple" and "complex" requests?
18. **Does the FOIA website provide/link to instructions for obtaining the status of a request and how to request an estimated date of completion?**
19. Does the FOIA website describe or link to a description of the types of requests that would be considered overly burdensome by the agency or not sufficiently specific?
20. **Does the FOIA website describe or link to a description of the administrative appeals process?**
21. **Does the FOIA website inform requesters that they have 90 days to file an appeal?**
22. Do the FOIA website and FOIA Library/Reading Room include accessible contact information that individuals with disabilities can use if they encounter inaccessible documents?

23. **Does the agency/comp. post agency FOIA logs to its FOIA website and/or FOIA Library/Reading Room?**
24. Enter the date of the most recent FOIA log posted to the agency's FOIA website and/or FOIA Library/Reading Room
25. Does the FOIA website describe or link to agency records schedules?